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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY UPDATE: KOSTUNICA'S "BATTLE WITH
U.S."

¶1. (SBU) Summary: With news of another rejection by Russia on a UNSC draft resolution, Prime Minister Kostunica used his strongest anti-U.S. rhetoric to date in reaction to the Ambassador's direct speech about Serbia's path to Europe. Kostunica cast bilateral differences over Kosovo as a "battle" during comments on Vitovdan (June 28), the day marking the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. Meanwhile, President Tadic kept Kosovo his primary topic in meetings abroad, especially with Russian President Putin during an energy summit in Zagreb. End Summary.

Ambassador's Speech: Let Kosovo go, join Europe

¶2. (U) In a June 26 speech marking the 60th anniversary of the Mashall Plan, Ambassador Polt said that Serbia must let go of Kosovo and join Europe to secure a prosperous, stable future for its citizens. Noting that Pristina wants absolute independence while Belgrade will not accept independence, the Ambassador said that supervised independence for Kosovo as proposed by the Ahtisaari plan is a compromise solution. The Ambassador called the Ahtisaari plan a "rational" solution in the same vein as the Marshall Plan had been a rational response to the ravages of WWII, and that it was the product of over a year of negotiations which proved there can be no mutually acceptable agreement on Kosovo.

Kostunica vs. U.S.

¶3. (SBU) Kostunica began a week of pointed anti-U.S. rhetoric with comments to the press that the U.S. is "the leader in proposing that a part of Serbia's territory should be made into another Albanian state," and that such a policy is harming bilateral relations. He added that if the U.S. wants to develop good relations with Serbia, it "must respect its borders and territorial sovereignty." His party's spokesman echoed the same message, saying that the U.S. "bears the responsibility" of worsening relations with Serbia over Kosovo, and that progress in relations over many years is being "brought into question" over the issue.

¶4. (SBU) Kostunica then seized on the Ambassador's June 26 remarks in his Vitovdan remarks to Politika, saying that "a battle for Kosovo between Serbia and U.S." was underway. (Note: Europe was again spared Kostunica's barbs, as part of his continued effort to separate the U.S. from European players on Kosovo. End note.). The PM said the battle was

"between power and justice," and that he had faith that Russia would prevent the UNSC from "stealing a sovereign country's territory."

15. (U) Along with the Prime Minister, Radicals (SRS) and Socialists (SPS) also attacked the Ambassador for his remarks. SRS General Secretary Vucic said that the Ambassador's statements were "unprecedented scandal in contemporary diplomatic history," and that the policy implemented by the U.S., Great Britain and certain EU countries was "raw force." SPS leader Obradovic called the Ambassador's statements "additional pressure on Serbia."

15. (U) In response to Kostunica's remarks, the Ambassador refused to join the PM's rhetoric reminding an exhausted Serbian public that the U.S. is Serbia's friend and has no intention of engaging in any kind of battle with this country or its citizens. He stressed "there is no battle, fight or anger between the two countries; there are simply differences of opinions over some issues." Ambassador Polt added that there were many areas that Serbia and the U.S. agreed. Several dailies gave positive coverage to the Ambassador's reaction that the U.S. is a friend of Serbia; the Blic daily in its editorial criticized Kostunica as counterproductive for his inflammatory statements.

16. (U) With the DSS, DS, Radicals and Socialists taking the same stance on Kosovo, the Liberal Democrats said Kostunica and Tadic are pursuing the "wrong policy." LDP leader Jovanovic said that Tadic and Kostunica are wrong on Kosovo because they have brought Serbia into a situation in which it is dependent on Russian interests and into a conflict with the U.S. and EU.

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Tadic on cue on Kosovo

17. (SBU) After his speech to CoE deputies in Belgrade in which he called for autonomy over independence in Kosovo (septel), Tadic traveled to regional summits this week in Zagreb and Istanbul with a similar message. Over the weekend, in Zagreb, Tadic had a bilateral meeting with Russian President Putin after which Tadic said that any kind of independence for Kosovo is unacceptable, and that Serbia is ready to negotiate at any point and find a compromise solution. (Note: Our contacts tell us that since Kostunica had only shared his "secret plan" with Moscow, Tadic did not have access to it and therefore did not discuss it at this meeting. This may have been intended by Kostunica, in order to retain full control over Kosovo policy, especially vis-a-vis Moscow. End note.)

18. (SBU) On June 25, at a Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) summit in Istanbul, Tadic said that Kosovo independence would jeopardize the stability of the entire Black Sea region and beyond. The BSEC meeting concluded with Tadic reacting strongly to Albanian PM Berisha's statement that Kosovo was a unique case and should become independent. Belgrade media gave prominent coverage to Tadic rebuking Berisha for being irresponsible and "interfering in Serbia's internal affairs" followed by Berisha walking out of the meeting.

Bigger budget for Kosovo

19. (U) Serbian officials also tried to show their commitment to Kosovo by doubling the budget for Kosovo to 67.5M Euros. Deputy PM Djelic called the increase a proof of "the nature of Serbia's policy toward Kosovo." Kosovo Minister Samardzic said the increase would "finance [GOS]

functions in Kosovo" and also show "ethnic Albanians...that Serbia is serious and invests in its people." Samardzic also said the increase should demonstrate to the international community that Serbia has "serious intentions concerning Kosovo's financial recovery." In a separate interview, Djelic said that while Serbia cannot give up on Kosovo, it also cannot allow itself to be isolated again, even in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence by a global power. He assessed that there were two possible scenarios for Kosovo. "The first is undesirable, involving a scenario of conflict with forces which want independence (for Kosovo) declared no matter what the cost, even without support in the UNSC. The second scenario is one of compromise, the chances of which are still small, but growing."

Diplomatic Activity

¶10. (SBU) ICTY: ICTY prosecutor Del Ponte clarified this week her June 18 comments on Kosovo, saying she had not called for a delay in the status decision but instead simply hoped "the timing of that decision, will not affect current efforts to locate and arrest" ICTY indictees. This clarification received considerably less coverage in Belgrade than her original "misinterpreted" statements in which she called for the UNSC to delay a Kosovo status decision.

¶11. (U) UK: BETA reported outgoing PM Blair's message calling on all Kosovoars to be patient and not to resort to violence, but noted that the process of Kosovo independence is inevitable. British Ambassador to Belgrade Wordsworth also said that Britain considered Kosovo's independence, in accordance with Ahtisaari's proposal, to be the most sustainable outcome of the process of status determination. Wordsworth said, "Kosovo will be independent, but the question is whether that is going to happen in a peaceful process based on Ahtisaari's plan and with international supervision and solid guarantees for minorities, or in some chaotic way. I firmly believe that the other way will be bad for Kosovo, for Serbia and for the whole region, adding that Great Britain together with other UNSC members would continue working on the new resolution."

¶12. (U) Russia: Belgrade media covered Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's comments on June 23 that the allegations that violence would erupt in Kosovo if the province were denied independence are irresponsible as KFOR's mandate is

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to prevent violence.

¶13. (U) Belgium: Serbian press reported Belgian FM de Gucht's June 27 comments that Belgium, other countries in the UNSC, as well as majority of EU countries were in support direct negotiations for solving the status of Kosovo with a four month-duration and without a predetermined outcome. However, he also told Serbian reporters that Belgrade must understand that some form of decision on the Kosovo status has to be made after the four-month period, and this was why Serbia's commitment to these talks is critical.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) Kostunica has clearly committed to his tactics of attacking the U.S. exclusively and directly in hopes of isolating the U.S. as the sole supporter of the Ahtisaari plan and supervised independence of Kosovo. He went as far as to add volatile nationalism to the mix with the battle imagery already evoked with Vitovdan. While it is heartening that media coverage of the Ambassador's direct

contact with the Serbian public were welcomed in some quarters, Kostunica can be expected to keep other leaders in line with his new course of anti-American rhetoric over Kosovo. He wants a political battle to keep other political forces in line at home, with him at the front. Kostunica hopes he can also convince the international community that the U.S. is alone in calling for the Ahtisaari plan and supervised independence, while at least many Europeans and Russians agree with Belgrade on the need for talks without end. Tadic and "his" ministers in the cabinet are taking no public steps to counter this anti-American propaganda.

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